



Awards Ceremony 2022 Balzan Prizes

Opening Speech by the President of the International Balzan Foundation “Prize” Alberto Quadrio Curzio

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Illustrious President of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Professor Roberto Antonelli, Illustrious President of the International Balzan Foundation “Fund” Dr. Gisèle Girgis-Musy,

Today, five outstanding scholars are being honoured, three in the natural sciences (Robert Langer, Dorthe Dahl-Jensen, and Hans Oerlemans) and two in the humanities (Martha Nussbaum and Philip Bohlman). In a short while, the Chairman of the Balzan General Prize Committee, Professor Luciano Maiani, will read the motivations for awarding the prizes, and then we will listen to their speeches, certain that their knowledge has contributed and will continue to contribute to human progress.

On this occasion I will speak English since I am the President of the International Balzan Foundation “Prize”, although I should speak Italian to the members of the Accademia Lincei, or perhaps I should use Latin since this institution’s founders (including Federico Cesi and Galileo Galilei, whose portraits watch over us in this room) spoke and wrote in that language in the name of “Freedom to philosophize *in naturalibus*.”

This year we are also celebrating 60 years of the Balzan Foundation. The success story of the Balzan Prizes has been written by its Laureates, and for this reason a collection entitled *Premi Balzan 1961-2021* has been published with their photographs and the motivations for their awards. The synthesis of these concise motivations expresses a scientific and cultural force that is a contribution to a design for progress.

From an institutional and organisational point of view, an important contribution to this success has also come from the binational nature of what I call the “Balzan system”, which hinges on two Foundations: the Swiss Balzan “Fund” and the Italian Balzan “Prize”. This Italian-Swiss nature is also visibly expressed in the annual rotation of the awards ceremony in Rome and Bern.

It is of emblematic importance to recall that the first Prize, decided upon in 1961 and awarded in 1962, went to the Nobel Foundation and was presented to King Gustavus Adolf of Sweden in Rome by the President of the Italian Republic Antonio Segni. It was the Balzan Prize for Humanity, Peace, and Fraternity among Peoples, with the following motivation: “For its admirable work setting a shining example of brotherhood for all peoples of the world, reaching beyond all borders, without distinction of nationality, political interests, trends, or ideologies.”

In 1963, the Prize for Humanity, Peace, and Fraternity among Peoples was awarded to Pope John XXIII (deliberated in 1962) “For having contributed to maintaining peaceful relations between Nations, encouraging mutual understanding among peoples and establishing contacts outside the Christian community.” This Prize was also presented in Rome by the President of the Italian Republic Antonio Segni, who went to the Vatican to present the award as a sign of diplomatic protocol.

On the following day, the history of awarding Balzan Prizes to scientists and scholars in various fields of knowledge began. They were presented in Rome by the President of the Italian Republic Antonio Segni, and were awarded to Paul Hindemith (music, Germany), Andrej Kolmogorov (mathematics, Russia), Samuel Eliot Morison (history, USA), and Karl von Frisch (biology, Austria). The motivations can be seen as the model that has inspired many subsequent awards.

To Hindemith: “For the wealth, extent, and variety of his work, which is among the most valid in contemporary music, and which contains masterpieces of opera, symphonic, and chamber music.”

To Kolmogorov: “For his contributions to the development of new mathematical disciplines, in particular, the study of functions and the calculation of probabilities, which have shed light on other disciplines.”

To Morison: “For his contributions to the enrichment of contemporary culture, for the high value of his work on the maritime history of the United States, on the study of Christopher Columbus, and for his great talent as a writer.”

To von Frisch: “For having consecrated his entire life to experimenting on thousands of bees, thus discovering a true language of gestures for communication and opening new insights into the knowledge of insect behaviour.”

These scientists and humanists covered a broad range of subject areas that, to my knowledge, had never been the object of prizes in a unified whole of knowledge.

Pope John XXIII was also present at the ceremony in the Quirinal Palace, where he went specifically for the purpose of reciprocating the visit that the President of the Republic had made to the Vatican on the previous day, and to show his appreciation for the unity and multiplicity of the sciences.

After a period of interruption due to organisational reasons, the awarding of the Balzan Prizes but was resumed and sustained until and including 2021, with 88 personalities for the natural sciences and 84 personalities for the humanities were awarded. In addition, 11 prizes were awarded for Humanity, Peace, and Fraternity among Peoples. The Balzan Foundation has thus breathed with two lungs, as it were, in the unity of the multiplicity of knowledge comprised of sciences that dialogue with each other year after year, aware of the fact that from knowledge comes progress, and that both can contribute to human development and civilisation.

And here another innovation introduced by the Balzan “Prize” and “Fund” Foundations in 2001 comes into play. Half of the Prize awarded to each Balzan Prizewinner must be allocated to research programmes entrusted to young scholars coordinated by them. Since 2001, more than 80 research projects conducted by young people from 22 countries around the world have been supported, with over 500 researchers involved. Among them, there has been a significant increase in women scientists and humanists, who may in turn be among the Prizewinners of tomorrow, thus strengthening the presence of women in the Balzan Foundation’s success stories. From this wonderful initiative, another was born in 2011, a by-invitation-only seminar, (IinterLa+b), which is held almost every year and involves young researchers from these projects or from other areas, always respecting a variety of genders and cultures. These seminars have always been introduced and directed by two Balzan Prizewinners, one in the natural sciences and the other in the humanities. The role of the Prizewinners is further enhanced through the Annual Balzan Lectures (ABL), instituted in 2009 and delivered by one of the honoured winners of the Balzan Prize. Both IinterLa+b and the ABL have been existence for over 10 years.

Credit for these successes also goes to the aforementioned “Balzan system”, which consists of two foundations: the “Prize” (Italian) and the “Fund” (Swiss). The Italian foundation is concerned with the complex, delicate process that leads to the awarding of the Prizes, while the Swiss foundation is dedicated to maintaining the estate for the awarding of the Balzan Prizes. The proper functioning of this complex organization is also due to the contribution of the employees of the Balzan Foundation, one of whom I would like to single out as outstanding, Suzanne Werder, who has been Secretary General of the “Prize” Foundation for decades.

My thanks therefore go to the Boards of the Italian Balzan Foundation “Prize”, within whose framework the General Prize Committee operates in full respect of their reciprocal roles. The past

Presidents of the “Prize” Foundation were Giovanni Colli, Cesidio Guazzaroni, Bruno Bottai, and Enrico Decleva.

The role of the Swiss Balzan Foundation “Fund” has been no less important. Merit is therefore due to the Presidents of the “Fund”: Peter Herold, Paul-Dieter Klingenberg, Luisa Bürkler-Giussani, Achille Casanova, Claudio Generali, and Gisèle Girgis-Musy.

Finally, my deep thanks and admiration go to the Presidents of the General Prize Committee (GPC) whose scientific and cultural independence is also valued by the different cultures and nationalities of the members who have expertly chosen the subject areas in which to grant awards as well as the winners of the Balzan Prizes. The Committee's choices have often anticipated innovative subjects by personalities who subsequently won other important international awards.

For this, we should remember and thank its succession of Chairmen: Antonio Carrelli, Carlo Bo, Sergio Romano, Salvatore Veca, and Luciano Maiani. This year, too, the General Prize Committee has worked very well in the admirable spirit of collaboration between GPC Chairman Maiani and the Chairmen of the special subcommittees, Peter Kuon for the humanities and Jules Hoffman for the sciences.

Thus, it seems to us that over time, a kind of *community* has gradually formed around the Balzan – and thanks to it. This community primarily consists of the Prizewinners, but it also includes – and in increasing numbers – those who have participated and are participating in the various research projects.

It may take time to evaluate advances in knowledge throughout the course of history, but I think it can be said that the Balzan Prize has done much to understand and promote these advances in the name of human development.

This is why we are grateful to the President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella, who will receive the 2022 Laureates and a delegation from the two Balzan Foundations at the Quirinale this afternoon, 25 November 2022. It will mark the institution's return to its beginnings 60 years ago, when due to the generosity of Eugenio and Lina Balzan, the President of the Republic delivered the first Prizes. To President Mattarella we will present the first copy of the volume *Premi Balzan 1961 2021*.